

# THREE SERMONS

PREACHED IN THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S,  
MARITZBURG,

BY

THE RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

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## A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S, MARITZBURG,

On Sunday Morning, April 29, 1866,

BY THE

RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

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JAMES I. 16-18.—*Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of His own Will begat He us with the Word of Truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.*

THERE is some doubt by whom this epistle of St. James was written. There were, as we know, two apostles who bore this name. There was James the Great, as he is called, the son of Zebedee and brother of St. John, who was put to death very early in the history of the Church, when, as we read in the Acts—

‘Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the Church; and he killed James the brother of John with the sword.’

The epistle was certainly not written by him, as we gather from its contents,—which imply by its expressions a much later state of things than could have existed in his time,—as well as from the voice of tradition. That voice ascribes it to James the Less, or one of those who are called in the New Testament, according to Jewish custom, the *brethren* of our Lord, though really the sons of Mary, the sister of the mother of Jesus, and therefore what we should call his first-cousin. This James appears to have filled a prominent position in the Church of Jerusalem in the apostolic times. When Peter was delivered from prison, and went, as we are told, to the ‘house of John, whose surname was Mark,’ he said to the damsel who came to the door to admit him, ‘Go, show these things unto James and to the brethren.’ When

the first Council was held at Jerusalem, and Barnabas and Paul had declared what God had done among the Gentiles by them, it is James who rises to address the assembled Church, and who suggests the course which was actually adopted. On a third occasion in the Acts James again occupies a foremost place, where the historian writes—

‘And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James: and all the elders were present.’

And lastly St. Paul, in the epistle to the Galatians, mentions that on one occasion he ‘went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days,’ and he adds—

‘But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord’s brother.’ i.19.

This last statement certainly does not imply any necessary superiority in James, though it shows that he was a conspicuous member of the Church at Jerusalem. But, in the next chapter, where St. Paul speaks of a second visit which he made to Jerusalem, fourteen years after the first, he places James at the head of those whom he styles the ‘pillars’ of that Church, naming him first in order, even before Cephas (Peter) and John:—

‘And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.’ ii.9.

And afterwards he speaks of ‘certain coming from James,’ evidently as deputed by him to observe the proceedings of St. Paul at Antioch.

There can be no doubt, then, that James filled the office, which the tradition of the Church ascribes to him, as first Head or Bishop of the Church at Jerusalem. But the question then arises whether he was the same as the other apostle James, the son of Alphæus or Cleopas,—for these are only different forms of the same name. It seems, on the whole, most probable that he was, though the matter is much disputed by even the most orthodox writers. But, whether he was the apostle or not, it is to James the Less, the first Bishop of Jerusalem, the ‘brother of our Lord,’ and therefore certainly one who mixed very closely with the apostles, that the general tradition of the Church has ascribed this epistle, though not indeed with positive certainty. Thus Eusebius writes, in the middle of the fourth century:—

These accounts are given respecting James, who is said to have written the first of the General (or Catholic) Epistles: but it is to be observed that it is

considered spurious. Not many, in fact, of the ancients have mentioned it, nor that either, which is said to be Jude's, and which is also one of the seven (so called) General Epistles. Still we know that these also were publicly used with the rest in most churches. ii.23.

The 'accounts' to which Eusebius refers, and which he had just given, of the life of this James, from the writings of an earlier historian Hegesippus, who lived about a hundred years after the time of the apostles, 175 A.D., are very singular, and would throw considerable light on the contents of the epistle, if it was really due to him. Hegesippus writes as follows:—

From the apostles, James, the brother of the Lord, succeeds to the charge of the Church,—that James who has been called the Just from the time of the Lord to our own days; for *there were many of the name of James*. He was holy from his mother's womb, he drank not wine nor strong drink, nor did he eat animal food; a razor came not upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil; he did not use the bath. He alone might go into the holy place; for he wore no woollen clothes, but linen. And alone he used to go into the temple, and there he was commonly found upon his knees, praying for forgiveness for the people; so that his knees grew dry and hard like a camel's, from his constantly bending them in prayer, and entreating forgiveness for the people. On account therefore of his exceeding righteousness he was called 'the Just,' and the 'bulwark of the people,' and 'righteousness,' as the prophets declare of him. Some of the seven sects, then, which I have mentioned, enquired of him, 'What is the door of Jesus?' And he said that this man was the Saviour; wherefore some believed that Jesus is the Christ. Now the forementioned sects did not believe in the Resurrection, nor in the coming of one who shall recompense everyone according to his works: but all who became believers believed through James. When many, therefore, of the rulers believed, there was a disturbance among the Jews and Scribes and Pharisees, saying, 'There is a risk the whole people will expect Jesus to be the Christ.' They came together therefore to James, and said, 'We pray thee, stop the people, for they have gone astray after Jesus as though he were the Christ. We pray thee to persuade all that come to the Passover concerning Jesus; for we all give heed to thee; for we and all the people testify to thee that thou art just, and acceptest not the person of man. Persuade the people, therefore, not to go astray about Jesus, for the whole people and all of us give heed to thee. Stand therefore on the gable of the temple, that thou mayest be visible; and that thy words may be heard by all the people.' . . . Therefore they placed James on the gable of the temple, and cried out to him and said, 'O Just one, to whom we ought all to give heed, seeing that the people are going astray after Jesus that was crucified, tell us what is the door of Jesus?' And he answered with a loud voice, 'Why ask ye me about Jesus the Son of Man? He sits in heaven on the right hand of great power, and will come on the clouds of heaven.' . . . And they cried out saying, 'Oh! Oh! even the Just is gone astray.' They went up therefore, and threw down the Just one, and they said to one another, 'Let us stone James the Just.' And they began to stone him, for he was not killed by the fall. But he turned round, and knelt down, and cried, 'I beseech thee, Lord God, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' . . . Then one of them, who was a fuller, took the club with which he beat the clothes, and brought it down upon the head of the Just one. And so he bore his witness.

It is impossible to say how much of all this story is true, more especially as it differs considerably from the account

which Josephus gives of the martyrdom of James: and it is most probable that we have here—even in this early age, about the middle of the second century—another instance of the rapid growth of mythical and legendary stories in the Church, clustering around the memories of its founders. But this, at all events, seems to be certain that James, the first Bishop of Jerusalem, was martyred, and also that he was eminently noted as ‘James the Just,’ that he lived himself a strict and holy life, laying more stress upon the practice of righteousness than on the mere profession of an orthodox faith. And this is the very characteristic which, as you are well aware, singularly distinguishes the epistle before us. From beginning to end it is a series of lessons upon the daily duties of common life. Religion and Morality are treated throughout as one and the same thing; or, if the writer recognises for a moment the notion of their being separated, it is to tell us that—

‘If any man seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man’s religion is vain,’—

it is to bid us—

‘be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving our own selves,’—

it is to warn us again and again that—

‘As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.’

So strongly was this felt, as you have heard, no doubt, by the great Reformer Luther, who preached so strenuously the doctrine of faith—a simple trust in God’s promises—a childlike dependence on His forgiving Mercies and Fatherly Love—in opposition to the slavish spirit of dependence on rites and ceremonies and priestly mediation, engendered by the corruptions of Rome—that he called this epistle ‘an epistle of straw in comparison with St. Paul’s writings’;—that is, he did not call it absolutely ‘an epistle of straw,’ as his words are commonly reported, but only relatively to that rich treasure of evangelical truth—the ‘gold, and silver, and precious stones’—which he found in those of St. Paul. For, indeed, he speaks elsewhere, in his preface to the epistle itself, very highly of its value:—

This epistle of St. James, although it was rejected by the ancients, I praise and account it good notwithstanding, for this reason that it sets forth no human teaching and presses home the Law of God. However, that I may speak my judgment about it, but without prejudice to any one, I regard it as no apostle’s writing, and this is my main reason for it. In the first place, that, in direct opposition to St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture, it ascribes justification to



works, and says, 'Abraham was justified by his works, because he offered up his son,' whereas St. Paul, Rom. iv. 2, 3, teaches the contrary, that Abraham was justified without works.' . . . . But this James does nothing else but urge obedience to the Law and its works, and mixes up so confusedly one thing with another, that it seems to me he must have been some pious man, who as a disciple had caught up and set on paper some sayings of the apostle.

In truth, as Hegesippus says in the passage which I have just before quoted, 'there were many of the name of James': and it is quite possible that one of these, not James the apostle, nor James the first Bishop of Jerusalem, but some other James altogether, who was merely, as Luther says, a 'disciple' of the apostles, may have composed this epistle. But in any case there is good ground for believing that it must have been written before the end of the first century. And thus we have undoubtedly in this epistle a very early instance of Christian teaching—either of an actual apostle of Christ, or of the first Bishop of the Christian Church, or at all events of one who had lived himself in the very age of the apostles of Christ, and no doubt was personally acquainted with their teaching. And it is certainly remarkable that he lays so much more stress upon righteousness of life than upon correctness of belief—that he lays no stress at all upon the latter, and that, though he would have uttered, beyond all doubt, a severe reproof, if he had found 'any man that is called a brother' to be—

'a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner,'—

he does not give the least indication that he would have abjured the society of those who merely differed from himself in matters of religious opinion, or refused to hold communion with them. Nay, he says that our religion, if it leads to 'bitter envying and strife,' to 'wars and fightings,' cannot be of heavenly birth—it is not the 'wisdom from above,' which is—

'first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits.'

He tells us that such 'wisdom' as that, which sends 'out of the same mouth blessing and cursing,' so that—

'therewith bless we God, even the Father, and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God,'—

whatever we may think of it, is 'earthly, sensual, devilish.' He says that 'pure Religion before God and the Father is this'—not the maintenance of an orthodox Creed, or observ-

ance of the ‘strict law of the Church,’—to ‘transgress’ which, says one of our English Bishops, is ‘simple rebellion against Christ,’—but—

‘To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep one’s-self unspotted from the world.’

There is also another noticeable fact in this epistle, viz., that the *name* of Jesus or Christ is scarcely ever mentioned in it, while yet, I need not say, the true spirit of Christ pervades the whole of it. *Twice* only in these five chapters is any direct reference made to that name, and then only in a very general manner. Thus the writer begins by describing himself as ‘James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ’; and again he says—

‘My brethren hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, of glory—[that is, either *the* Lord of glory, as our English Version fills up the blank which exists in the original, or, as others understand it, *that* faith of glory, that glorious faith,]—with respect of persons.’

These are the only instances in which he mentions the Saviour’s name, while yet holding firmly, as we see, ‘the faith our Lord Jesus Christ,’ though he might not have been able to declare his ‘unfeigned assent and consent’ to all the subtleties of all the Creeds. He speaks, as we have just heard, of ‘pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father,’—of our ‘blessing God, even the Father’; he tells us in the text that ‘every good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father of Lights.’ And I need hardly remind you that, like our Lord himself, like St. Paul and the other apostles, he instructs us ‘when we pray, to say, Our Father.’

‘If any of you lack wisdom, let him *ask of God*, that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him;’

‘Draw nigh *to God*, and He will draw nigh to you.’

Yes! in *this* respect, as well others, the spirit of Christ, and of Christ’s divine teaching, pervades the whole of this epistle—that spirit of patient trust in God’s providential care and love, of steadfast desire and endeavour to do our Father’s Will, of tender concern and brotherly-love towards one another, which marks the true Christian, one who is such in the heart and not merely in the head, and which is more pleasing in God’s sight than the most fiery zeal and the loudest profession of love to the Saviour’s Name. And as we may devoutly trust and believe that spirit to be reigning even now by God’s Grace in the hearts of many, who can-



not pronounce the watchwords of this party or that, —who may be given over by their more orthodox brethren to perdition, as heretics or unbelievers, but who are known of Him, who ‘seeth in secret and shall one day reward openly,’ each man according to his works. Nay, we may believe that there are many, who do not acknowledge the Christian faith at all, and yet have been taught, and are now being led, by the Spirit of God. Surely, there are many such as these, and have been in all ages,—‘meek, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers,’—men who have been ‘persecuted for righteousness sake,’—and whom Christ himself would have pronounced to be ‘blessed,’—though they may not have outwardly confessed him as Lord, though they may not have even known his name, nor the name of the Living God. Inwardly, they *have* acknowledged the Son of God, the Living Word, who spoke with them all along, as the Lord of their consciences, whenever they chose the good and eschewed the evil. They have bound themselves to His Law so far as it was revealed to them,—so far as as they had light vouchsafed to them from the Father of Lights, wherewith to read it. The spirit of Christ, in fact, may be often ruling there, when his name may not be honoured or even known: while experience too plainly tell us, that the name of Christ may be very much upon men’s lips, while his spirit—that spirit of ‘love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,’—may be very far indeed from possessing the heart, and exhibiting its fruits in the life.

It is now, and it was so of old, when St. James wrote the words of the text. There were those then, who professed the faith of Christ, yet lived to dishonour it, and ‘blasphemed that worthy name by which they were called.’ And they tried to throw the blame of their sins upon the Blessed God, as if the nature which He had given them, or the circumstances in which He had placed them, had caused them to fall. St. James raises his voice against this:—

‘Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.’

We are all prone to do this: we are ever ready to be indulgent to ourselves—to find some excuse for our faults and shortcomings. Few, perhaps, will venture to charge

their sins and miseries directly in plain words upon Him who made them: though it must be feared that, among the seething mass of untrained thought and feeling of the present day,—among the multitudes who have been driven from the true comforts and supports of Christian teaching, by the unreal superstitions of some or the hard and cruel dogmatism of others, or who are left without any teaching whatever through the neglect of those whom God has blessed with light,—such things may too often be heard. But we all indirectly do this, whenever we say of our faults or failings, ‘I cannot help it, I cannot be a saint, if I would,’—or, ‘My life is hard, I must rub through the world as best I can,’—‘Who can keep his garments always clean? Who can touch filth, and not be defiled?’

But were you then, indeed, my brother, *compelled to sin*? And, if life is hard, and circumstances are trying,—hard and trying more or less for all of us, though in different ways,—yet, if only God’s gracious help is sure, what better school for virtue, for manly energy in resisting evil, could Infinite Wisdom have devised? For, when we use the expression ‘Our *Maker*’ with reference to ourselves as men, we feel that it is an imperfect phrase. All that God has made is good: all His works praise Him: each in its place fulfils His will. But for us, who are His offspring, His Will is our highest—and therefore our moral and spiritual—perfection. And, in order to attain this, we must ‘work out’ our own salvation. There is no other road to it: virtue itself would not be virtue, if it were conferred entire and perfect on any creature. We may be sure, then, that God’s way of training His children is best: we may realise the wisdom of St. James’s words when he says—

‘My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing this that the trial of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.’

No! the trials and temptations of life are meant by Divine Wisdom and Goodness as our very means of education for the Kingdom of God. Not to harass and distress us merely, are they ordered—still less, to make us fall and be an excuse for our falling—but to prove us, and strengthen us, and perfect us more and more in the spirit of His children: and, whatever be the trial with which He sees good to try us, as St. James says, ‘He giveth more grace’—He gives us strength wherewith to overcome, if we will only

use it. Our sins, he tells us, and the bitter fruits of our sins, were all our own; though God can turn that very bitterness to joy, and make it a healing medicine for the soul. But our goods and blessings of every kind—our comforts of hope, our feelings of penitence,—our wisdom and virtue,—our intellectual, moral, and spiritual achievements—are all God's gifts of grace, bestowed on us by the Father of Lights, who is Absolute Goodness, unchanging and unclouded Light.

'Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning.'

I do not imagine that any distinction is here meant to be drawn—as some suppose—between '*good* gifts' and '*perfect* gifts.' In fact, in the Greek original the words 'every good gift and every perfect gift' form a line of poetry, and may very probably have been quoted by memory from some well-known writing. What St. James means to say is, that nothing evil came from God—that what He gives, whatever it may be, must be good and perfect, cannot be itself the cause of sin—that, if we sin in consequence of having received it, it is our lust which has dragged us on—which has conceived and brought forth sin, and then sin has brought forth death. We might apply this to a thousand different matters in daily life—to the health and strength, the rank and wealth and beauty, the power and influence, mental or bodily, which are bestowed upon different individuals, and which are all 'good and perfect gifts' as they came from the Father of Lights, and as such should be thankfully welcomed by us, and used to the praise of the Great Giver, though they are frequently abused to His dishonour. But they are specially applicable to that wonderful increase of Scientific Light, which God has poured around us in this our day, and which it were as sinful to despise and reject, as it would be to shut our eyes to the Light, which streams to us from the pages of the Bible. The revelation to Man of each new fact of Science—Geological, Astronomical, Medical, Critical, whatever it may be—is a 'good and perfect gift from above, coming down to us from the Father of Lights.' And, if we are obedient children of the Living God, true sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, we shall gratefully receive the knowledge of such facts, and be sure that *they* cannot harm us—they

cannot lead us into sin, into irreligion, ungodliness, atheism. It is only our corrupt hearts that can do this; and doubtless these hearts of ours may abuse this gift of God, as well as any other, and make it an excuse for their own unfaithfulness. But God's gifts still—the revelations of Science—are 'good and perfect,' and are meant for the setting forth of God's glory and the advancement of our own highest good. And we shall fail in our duty to the Father of spirits,—we shall war against His gracious purpose towards us,—if we do not cherish, with thankful earnestness and reverence, as a precious token of His favour, the increase of knowledge which He gives us in this our day, remembering that it is 'from above,' and, not as some seem to think, from the abyss of hell,—that it—

'cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.'

Our God is here compared to the Sun, whose bright, pure, light gladdens the whole earth, and is the life and joy of every sentient creature. And the resemblance is even more perfect and beautiful, when illustrated by the modern discoveries of Science, than even the writer could have supposed: since we now know that pure white light is made up of innumerable rays of different shades of colour, which serve to *shadow* forth with their faint radiance the various perfections of the Divine Character, but represent together, blended into one, the full bright glory of the 'Father of Lights,' that glory unapproachable by human thought, 'which no man hath seen or can see.' But one difference St. James has noted: the visible Sun shines not with constant brightness, glows not with steady power. The light and heat which it bestows are variable quantities: they are subject to change not merely through the daily interchange of day and night, but also from change of place or change of season. With Him there is no 'variableness,'—no change from 'parallax,' as the Greek original expresses it, like the difference of the solar power, perceived by leaving the burning soil of Egypt or Palestine for the colder regions of the frozen North—no 'shadow of turning,' like that which we observe while standing fixed in the same place ourselves, and watching the midday shadows change in length, as the Sun approaches his northern or southern 'place of turning' or 'tropic.' No! our God and Father, Blessed be His Name! is one and the same gracious Being,

—"the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,"—Jehovah, the "Living God,"—the God of our fathers, the God of our children. His Love it is which links the ages together by constant streams of goodness and blessing. From the first hour that an intelligent human being breathed upon this earth, He has been graciously revealing Himself more and more clearly and fully to the children of men. One 'good and perfect gift' after another has come down to us from above, from the Father of Lights: and by the wonderful gift of speech, and the art of writing by which that gift is supplemented,—both 'good and perfect gifts,' like the rest, though often so fearfully abused,—the knowledge of past ages has been handed on to our own; and we, through God's grace, are still being blessed with more, which we too must devoutly receive and pass on to others.

For, as St. James tells us—

'By His own Will begat He us with the Word of Truth.'

The 'Word of Truth' is a seed of life when planted in the soul of man. There is no life in falsehood, in dead superstitions, in unreal forms, and formularies which have lost their meaning amidst the clearer light of the present day. The 'Word of Truth,' the Truth of God, in the heart and mind, is a living, growing, thing. If we think to shut it up in formulas, in unchanging letters, we shall lose it. As well might we attempt to imprison the sunshine and the common air, as to appropriate the Truth of God to our own exclusive use, by fixing it in some definite unchanging form of words. There was a time when men felt this, and breathed the fresh air, and walked freely in the light of day, under the first teachings of the Gospel. But then came the age of creeds and formularies, when men no longer moved at large on the surface of God's earth, rejoicing in their birthright as children of God, in 'the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free,' but followed age after age in the deep ruts worn by preceding ages, no longer walking in the light of God's Truth, but by the dim lantern-light of human dogmas and Church-articles. Words are indeed the vehicles of truth to us: but words ever tend to change, to decay, to lose their force by use. They need to be kept in the fresh feelings of the heart, or they will be dead at least to us; and the mind thirsting after truth, after the knowledge of God, of real being, will be compelled to lay by old forms of belief, in order not to lose that belief which was



once embodied in them. To hold, tenaciously, in short, by the old forms, when the meaning is departed, is but feeding on husks instead of living bread. And whatever there may be in our traditionary religious teaching, which bears this character, must be stripped off and swept away, while the precious kernel of truth will still remain.

For let us not doubt this, that in the past the Word of Truth was all along the seed of life in men's hearts as it is now. Mixed up with the superstition and ignorance of the early Church—with the myths and legends, the apocryphal gospels and epistles, the extravagant dogmas of Augustine, the absurd and lying stories of Jerome, the worship of the Virgin and the Saints, the adoration of relics and images, and all the countless follies and falsehoods which have corrupted the simple teachings of Christ,—mixed up with all this, I say, there has been a leaven of Divine Life, working ever insensibly in the hearts of men—not, as they thought, by the agency of marvels and miracles, wrought by the hands, the clothing, or by the bones, of saints,—not by the zeal of fiery Bishops, excommunicating one another, or by the decrees of Synods and Councils, enforcing a belief in creeds and dogmas, and condemning to uttermost perdition those who differed by one iota from them—no, not in this way, by the threat of Divine judgments, or the infliction of temporal ones—not by the wind, the earthquake, and the fire,—but by the still-small voice of God's Spirit, speaking within the hearts of men—bidding them believe, and hope, and live, in the assurance of a Father's Love. 'Of His own Will begat He them with the Word of Truth.' In the teaching of the great Fathers of the Church, wrapped up often in a mass of conceit,—of folly, ignorance, and untruth,—of which you have had some specimens brought before you in former discourses,—there was always the precious seed of the truth of God's Love, as revealed to us in all His dealings with us, and specially by the lips and in the life and death of Jesus our Lord. And this, when received into a kindly soil, into a 'honest and good heart,' under the influences of God's good Spirit, fructified and grew into a strong and living faith that worked by love—'bearing fruit and bringing forth, some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty.' And so it is, we are sure, in the present day. In all the sects of Christendom, amidst all the varieties of Creed, mixed up, no doubt, in every portion of the Church



with much of infirmity, ignorance, and error, the Word of Truth is still a seed of life, as ever, in the hearts of true men : it is by this they are begotten to a lively hope : by this they are quickened in faith and love. And our special privilege and joy is this, that, as we are enabled to take wider views of God's Love than others, while we realise, I trust, not less deeply than they His Truth and His Holiness, we can look around on them as embraced with us in the Arms of His Fatherly Goodness. You may have heard that the Romish Cardinal has just replied—we must suppose in the name of his Church—to those ‘Anglo-Catholic’ Clergy, who have approached his Eminence of late with an address, expressing their desire for communion with Rome, while still remaining priests of the English Church, and who have supported their request by saying—

Whatever may have been less perfect in the faith of the Flock, in Divine Worship and in Ecclesiastical Discipline, we have improved beyond our hope ; and, not to be forgetful of other things, we have shown an amount of goodwill towards the venerable Church of Rome, which has rendered us suspected in the eyes of some.

He has replied, indeed, and the voice of Rome is still heard, as in the days of old—

Whoever separate themselves in any manner from the unity of the faith, or from the society of him (Blessed Peter), such can neither be absolved from the bonds of sin, nor enter the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven.

There are others in our own Church ready to “cut off,” as they say, “from the Church of God,” those who do not hold with them that “what the Catholic Church, during the first thousand years of her history, declared to be or received as the true Faith, *that* is the true Faith and must be received as such.” It is *our* joy to know that no child of man, whose heart has once been quickened by the Spirit of God, whom God has once ‘begotten with the Word of Truth,’ can ever be excluded by any human agency like this from the Church of God—that ‘the gifts and callings of God are without repentance’—that He will never cast out a soul that truly loveth Him. And we believe that there are many such souls in the Church of Rome, by which we ourselves are excommunicated,—many such within our own Church, in the ranks of those whose zeal has outrun their charity,—who yet truly love God in their inmost hearts, and have been ‘begotten by Him with the Word of Truth.’ And beyond the narrow bounds of our own Church,—yea, beyond the bounds of the Catholic Church of Christ,—we believe

that there are others, sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, also 'begotten by the Word of Truth,' and truly loving and serving God, according to the light vouchsafed to them, of whom we may say, in the words of Richard Baxter, which I have formerly quoted—

I can never believe that a man may not be saved by that religion, which doth but bring him to the true love of God, and to a heavenly mind and life.

But, if our sphere of human love is thus enlarged—if, begotten by the Word of Truth ourselves, we feel that there is room in our Father's heart for all,—let us never forget that 'by His Will' God has thus begotten us, and that Will is coupled with the purpose, as stated by St. James in the text, 'that we should be a kind of first fruit of His creatures.' This is true in the first instance of all Christians. As the first-fruits under the Jewish Law—the choicest sheaf of the ripened grain—were offered in the temple, not to discredit and reject, but to sanctify, the whole, so Christians have been blessed with more light than others, that they should be the first-fruits of the whole human race—the choicest offering of the whole field of Humanity—not to condemn, but to sanctify, the whole. As St. Paul says,—

'If the first-fruits be holy, the lump is also holy.'

If the 'Father of Lights' of His own gracious Will—not because we loved Him, but because He loved us—has begotten us Christians with the Word of Truth to a hope more bright than that of other men, this is not to cast them off, and doom them, as some think, to endless misery—far be from us such blasphemy!—but to be to us a sign of hope, of goodwill from above, for them also,—to be a motive for our labouring with heart and soul on their behalf, and a pledge that our Father will be pleased with such work, and will abundantly bless our labours.

But especially are these closing words of the text true with reference to those among us, who have received the brighter light of the present day, and have rejoiced in it. 'Let not our good be evil spoken of:' nay, rather, let not the 'good and perfect gift,' with which we have been blessed, be without its due effect upon our lives, in deepening our gratitude to the Divine Giver, in quickening our desire and strengthening our resolve to live as the children of God, and in widening our charity to all around us. We can afford to be patient, forbearing, gentle, towards others,

who yet may condemn us ; for we do not believe that our eternal hopes can depend upon our holding this or that particular article of faith. We may well lay to heart St. James' words, which follow the text, and be ' swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath,' as those who know that in our Father's Love we are all embraced, and that ' the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.' But let us not be therefore ' gentle' to ourselves, ' forbearing' in respect of our own unfaithfulness, ' patient' in dealing with our own besetting sins. Let us not thus turn God's grace into lasciviousness, and bring down His merciful judgments upon us. To us, surely, with tenfold power, those words apply which St. James wrote of old for his disciples :—

“ Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls.”

## A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S, MARITZBURG,

On Sunday Morning, May 6, 1866,

BY THE

RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

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MATT. iv. 14-16.—“ *That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet saying, The land of Zabulon and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people which sat in darkness saw a great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.*”

HERE is an instance of the kind to which I referred in my discourse of last Sunday Evening, where the writer of the Gospel narrative,—whether Matthew himself, in those notes of his which furnished, it would seem, the ground-work of the present Gospel, or more probably the unknown compiler, to whom we owe it as it now lies before us,—has quoted the language of some ancient prophecy, as singularly applicable to the later event which he is engaged in describing. And this, in fact, as I explained, is the highest characteristic of true prophecy, that it is “not of any private interpretation;” it cannot be restricted to the age or to the event, with reference to which it may have been originally uttered; it is an utterance of Divine Truth, of the Living Word of God, which in its essential character is applicable to all times, which is no mere prognostic, foretelling some particular event in the history of one person or of one people, but contains eternal truth for all ages, the result of deep insight into human nature, and into the dealings of God with man, His child, in the past. In this way prophecy is a proof to us of the existence of a Living God—of One who

was and is the God of our fathers, as He is now our God—a proof that one and the selfsame Spirit is in all ages teaching the spirits of men,—a proof that the human race, amidst all external differences of time and place and circumstances, is yet essentially the same, its relations to the Divine Creator the same, its hopes and fears, its longings and desires, its needs and its experiences, the same substantially, in the ages long ago as now. Then, as now, the “holy men of old,” the prophets, or preachers of God’s Word, “spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” Then, as now, God’s Word came home with power to the hearts of men,—was felt to be truth,—bore its own witness to the conscience,—and was to some “a savour of death unto death,” to others “a savour of life unto life.”

This power of prophecy, appearing in single individuals and often in dark times, has, in fact, surprised the hearers—at least the more devout among them—into a confession of a present Divinity. Such living words, such clear insight justified by the event, seemed to them to prove the presence of something more than human, of a knowledge beyond what belonged to the mere creature of a day,—one who, as the Psalmist says, ‘cometh up as a flower and is cut down,’ who ‘fleeth as a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.’ Yet is Man justly described as a creature that ‘looks before and after,’—and we shall find that, as the past is his inheritance, so is the future also. It would not be so if we were living in a Universe which was governed by a capricious and changeable being, instead of by Jehovah, the Living God, ‘the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.’ The progress of the race, the advancement in science of every kind, the study of philosophy, the results of experience, would not then bring Man nearer to a knowledge of the course of nature or of human history. Of such a Being, *miracle*, as it is popularly understood, would be the only, as it would be the fitting, manifestation. We should be living in the realm of naked Will, and God would be known as Will alone, as irresistible, incomprehensible, Sovereignty.

But it is not so. The Father of spirits—the Father of all—reveals Himself by His Word to our hearts and minds as the Fountain of Law—as the *Holy Will* in the *spiritual* world,—in the *sensible* world as the author of this stupendous, yet most beautiful and orderly, Universe. In this latter world of sense, we know, His children, enlightened by Him, by

virtue of those faculties with which He has gifted them, and in accordance therefore with their Creator's Will, have made acquaintance with the laws of the innumerable orbs of space, and are able to foretell with certainty their motions for a far-distant future. The miraculous portents of former ages have become for us the most regular and orderly events in nature: the comets and eclipses, which struck terror into the nations of old, which frighten the ignorant and superstitious now, are familiar and foreseen by the astronomer of the 19th century. But these prophecies of Science—the truths and lessons which she teaches—are “not of any private interpretation.” The sun does not veil his face in disastrous gloom with special reference to any one person, or foretell a time of woe to one particular nation, as men used to suppose. The aspects of the heavens are not partial, as astrology vainly deemed; nor are the fates of individual men, princes or heroes, written upon the starry skies, so as to be deciphered there. Whatever lessons are taught by the course of events in the natural world, we now know that they are meant for us *all*,—that they unfold to us more and more of those unchanging laws, by which the whole universe is governed. Even the lower heavens, the world of clouds and winds, which seem so irregular and capricious, are in these days more and more distinctly seen to be subject to Law; the predictions of the barometer and thermometer cannot be neglected with impunity; and the weather-prophet, although he cannot speak with the certainty of the Almanac, can yet give advice to the sailor and the husbandman, which they do well not to despise.

But these prophecies, in the realm of nature, are *general* in their application,—they are “not of any private interpretation,”—they are meant for all. The careful and experienced farmer may know sufficient of the meteorology of his own district and the quality of his own land, to foretell the crops, and to wait upon and watch for the season. He may use such knowledge wisely and well to his own advantage. But no knowledge, that he can thus acquire, will merely of itself bring more profit to *him* than to his neighbour, or be in the nature of a prognostication of his own peculiar private fortunes. Thus the soothsaying, conjuring, and foretelling of past generations have been transfigured into an increased acquaintance with the laws of God in nature, available to the wise, the diligent, and the patient,



—elevating, instead of degrading, to humanity, and therefore more honourable to God.

It is a great thing thus to feel—and, thank God! it is the growing feeling of our age—that the whole Universe is under Law to God,—that nothing happens by chance under His Government, nothing at random, nothing by arbitrary interference, nothing but what might be expected from the regular and constant action of His own orderly, eternal, laws,—and to feel that the same thing also is true in the *moral* world—that sin will inevitably be followed with bitter consequences, and that, amidst all present trials and perplexities,—

“light is certainly sown for the righteous, and joyful gladness for such as are true of heart.”

It is a great thing to realise the truth of those words, which were uttered two thousand years ago by a Roman prophet—I mean the great orator and philosopher, Cicero, who wrote as follows:—

Law, properly understood, is no other than Right Reason, agreeing with nature, spread abroad among all men, ever consistent with itself, eternal, whose office it is to summon to duty by its commands, to deter from vice by its prohibitions,—which, however, to the good never commands or forbids in vain, never influences the wicked either by commanding or forbidding. In contradiction to this Law nothing can be laid down, nor does it admit of partial or entire repeal. Nor can we be released from this Law either by vote of the Senate or decree of the People. Nor does it require any commentator or interpreter besides itself. Nor will there be one Law at Athens, and another at Rome, one now, and another hereafter; but one eternal, immutable Law will both embrace all nations and at all times. And there will be one common Master, as it were, and Ruler of all, namely, God, the Great Originator, Expositor, Enactor, of this Law; which Law whosoever will not obey, will be flying from himself, and, having treated with contempt his human nature, will in that very fact pay the greatest penalty, even if he shall escape other punishments, as they are commonly considered.

If, indeed, we turn from nature, where all is obedience and submission,—where “the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handywork,”—where “fire and hail, snow and vapours, wind and storm, fulfil His word,”—where the earth, which He “hung upon nothing,” “abideth” even as “He established it,”—where as the ancient writer in Genesis, with a sure trust in the faithfulness of God, foretold,—

“while the earth remains, seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night, do not cease,”—

if we turn, I say, from these things to the world of men’s doings, which we call History, all seems at first compara-

tively confusion, man rebelling against the laws of his being, "destroying himself" and his kind, and needing all the terrible discipline, of which the suffering and sorrows of countless generations are the fruit,—a discipline which yet seems often to fall blindly, and to destroy the righteous with the wicked. And we may be tempted at times to yield in despair to the fearful thought, that the Judge of all the earth will *not* do right, that His dealings with Man are not equal, that we shall not be able to trace the Law in the Moral world, and predict the future from the past.

But no! amidst the infinite confusions, which the perversity of human wills has introduced, we believe in a kingdom of God set up in the moral and spiritual world, as orderly and sure as that which we are certain now exists in the natural world. That kingdom, indeed, as our Lord has said, 'cometh not with observation,'—cometh not with pomp and show, and outward signs, and visible demonstrations of its Presence. Yet the principles of it, as St. Paul says, are written in the hearts of all men,—

'their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another'—

are written not with ink, but with the finger of the Living God. There is a Divine Law, which when brought home to us by the Word of God, we feel at once to be 'holy, just, and good,' that Law which reigns in the Universe of moral being, and binds us to our Creator, in whose image we are made, and binds us all to one another—with respect to which, as Richard Hooker says—

There can be no less acknowledged than that her seat is the bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world; all things in heaven and earth do her homage, the very least as feeling her care, and the greatest as not exempted from her power; both Angels and Men, and creatures of what condition soever, though each in different sort and manner, yet all with uniform consent admiring her as the Mother of their peace and joy.

The *power*, in fact, of the Creator has extended to the production of creatures with *wills*, to be conformed, *but by their own act*, to His perfect Will. His *Wisdom* is displayed in overruling the results of the acting of these wills during their imperfect state, so as to bring order out of confusion, peace and love out of strife and selfishness, by orderly ways, however inscrutable to us, which we may hope in a more perfect state to trace and adore. But this, at least, we can see even here, that, if the fate of any individual *could* be shown to him beforehand,—if he could be certain to reap every

material advantage, and to attain the goods of this world, its wealth and power, by the exercise of virtue,—there would be no room for virtue to exist at all—the taunt of the old Satan would then be unanswerable, ‘Doth Job serve God for nought?’”

But, as in some work of art too close a view shows only confusion, while at the true focus every touch and stroke, every seemingly fortuitous light or shadow, contributes to one perfect and harmonious result, so shall it be when we reach that heavenly height, to which our souls aspire. And even here, in an inferior degree but not less truly, to those who are raised above their brethren, by longer experience,—to those who are gifted with deeper insight, with that keen spiritual vision, which is granted to some beyond others for the sake of all,—the maze of Providence becomes by glimpses clear,—the “Arm of the Lord is made bare,”—the Lord is seen to “execute judgment”; while the “path of the just,” though perhaps to the traveller himself it may be shrouded for a time in darkness, is beheld by such “prophets” as a shining light, “shining more and more unto the perfect day.”

Such is the nature of most of the prophecies contained in the Old Testament, and, in fact of the Sacred Writings generally, which, as one has wisely observed (S.T.Coleridge), are “everywhere prophecy, nowhere prognostication.” On this view they prove themselves to be indeed Divinely inspired. All through them we see the Lord “sitting above the waterfloods, remaining a King for ever,” holding the hearts of kings in His hands, making the wrath of man to praise Him, pleading the cause of the helpless. “Fear not,” said Joseph in the story to his brethren, “ye thought evil against me: but God meant it unto good, to save much people alive.” Hence the constant exhortations in the Scriptures to “wait patiently on God,” to leave our cause in His hands,—hence the frequent assurance that, though lying lips may prevail for a moment, yet “the lip of truth shall be established”—that, though we may have to suffer for a time, when our hearts condemn us not for any evil,—when we are conscious only of having done to the best of our power that which we believe to be right and good and true,—yet in God’s time, which is the best, we shall be delivered,—though now “sitting in darkness,” as the text says, we shall “see a great light.”

This does not warrant our folding our hands in indolence. As in higher matters we are to "work out our own salvation" because God worketh in us, so in things less vital, but still important to us, in trouble or perplexity of mind, in painful and embarrassing circumstances, it is our duty and privilege first to do our part, and then to take no thought for the morrow, leaving results in the hand of God. We know how the consciousness of something being inevitable, of escape from it being impossible, acts like an opiate upon all the passionate struggles of our nature. But, as Christians, let us add to this the devout confession, that this inevitable blow, which seems such a calamity, is directed by the hand of a Father, whose Wisdom and Love are infinite—

whose authority, in show  
When most severe, and mustering all its force,  
Is but the *graver countenance of Love*,—  
Whose favour like the clouds of spring may lour,  
And utter now and then an awful voice,  
But has a blessing in its darkest frown,  
Threatening at once and nourishing the plant.

There is nothing like this habitual reference of all events to the overruling Providence of a Father, for inducing this patient hopeful temper. In the case of a conqueror or hero, a confidence in his own destiny, a belief that there is something bright and peculiar in his "star," has often strengthened his hands, and delivered him from the vacillations and doubts and terrors, which might have ruined the cause of ordinary men. So a filial trust in the Great God may raise the Christian man, who is not otherwise distinguished above his fellows, to a position in which he may be a leader and a support to many. "In quietness and confidence must be our strength." Our troubles, as well as our joys, being part of the discipline of our lives, are but short, as is fitting for such frail and shortlived creatures. This is but a common-place, indeed, which reappears in innumerable proverbs and proverbial phrases, hardly worthy to be repeated here. But it becomes a living truth, and heart-felt, when we ascribe it to the ordinance of our Heavenly Father.

I have made these remarks generally with reference to the prophecies and promises of Scripture; but they are specially applicable to the text before us, where words of Isaiah are quoted, in which the prophet originally foretold

a gleam of glorious light for his afflicted people, when the judgment of God shall have done its work upon them :—

“ The people which sat in darkness saw a great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.”

To various memorable occasions in the history of the Jews, and in that of the Church, may these words be applied, as well as to circumstances of daily occurrence in the lives of individuals. In the New Testament they are quoted as illustrating the time, when the great light of our Saviour’s Teaching began to shine upon the world, still lying in comparative darkness. In the text itself they are employed with reference to that great salvation, which the prophet expected in his own time from some other Deliverer, who should come to “ sit upon the throne of David,”—

“ to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice henceforth and for ever.”

We will examine this morning more closely the sense in which this prophecy was originally uttered, reserving for the evening the further consideration of the subject.

There is no doubt that it refers primarily to the time, when the king of Assyria had already invaded, and was again about to invade, the land of the Ten Tribes, which formed what is called in Scripture the kingdom of Israel in distinction from the kingdom of Judah. We read in the Book of Kings, 2K.xvi.5-9, that—

“ Rezin, king of Syria, [whose capital was Damascus,] and Pekah, king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to war; and they besieged Ahaz, [king of Judah,] but could not overcome. . . . And Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, saying, I am thy servant and thy son; come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me. . . . And the king of Assyria hearkened unto him; for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin.”

Such was the fate of Syria and Damascus. As for Israel, we are told that the same king of Assyria took several of its towns,—

“ and Gilead, and Galilee, all the towns of Naphthali, and carried them captive to Assyria.” 2K.xv.29.

It is plainly to this advent that reference is made in the first verse of the 9th chapter of Isaiah, from which the writer in St. Matthew has quoted a portion, as applicable to the days of our Lord’s ministry. The prophet writes—

“ Nevertheless, the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at first He lightly afflicted the land of Zabulon, and the land of Naphthalim,



and afterward did more grievously afflict *by the way of the sea beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.*"

The Evangelist has selected, as I have said, only a portion of this verse, as suitable for his present purpose—viz. the description of the locality concerned—

"the land of Zabulon and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles."

He does not quote the prophet's account of the disasters which had befallen this part of the land. And, indeed, it is not easy to say what exactly Isaiah does mean in this verse. It reads intelligibly enough in the English version: but the original is perplexed and obscure; and the best commentators are very doubtful as to the true interpretation of the passage. On this point only they seem to be generally agreed, that the English Version does *not* give here a correct translation of the original Hebrew. This, however, does not affect the general meaning of the prophecy. For, whatever may be the exact sense of the prophet's words in this first verse, it is certain that he makes some reference in it to the affliction which these northern districts of Palestine had suffered from the Assyrians. And he then goes on to promise them light in their darkness, and deliverance at last from these troubles, when the yoke of the oppressor should be broken, and all Israel—the northern, as well as the southern, tribes—should be gathered once more, as he hoped, in one glorious Kingdom, under the rule of a prince of the seed of David.

"The people that were walking in darkness  
Have seen a great light;  
The dwellers in the land of the shadow of death—  
Light hath beamed upon them.  
Thou hast multiplied the nation;  
For it hast thou increased the joy;  
They joy before Thee as with the joy in harvest,  
As (men) rejoice at their dividing the spoil.  
For the yoke of his burden,  
And the staff of his shoulder,  
The rod of his oppressor,  
Thou hast broken, as in the day of Midian.  
For every boot of the booted (warrior) in the tumult,  
And the mantle rolled in blood,  
Shall be for burning, food for fire."

These last words are a more correct translation of the original than that which you would find in the English Bible, where we read,—

"For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise and garments rolled in blood: but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire."



The prophet, however, means to foretell that a time of peace and quietness shall come, when, as he says elsewhere,—

“ They shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
And their spears into pruning-hooks;  
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
Neither shall they learn war any more.”

And this idea he expresses here by saying that the warriors’ boots, and their blood-stained cloaks, should be piled in heaps and burnt, as the common practice was after a great victory. Thus in Ps.xlvi.9 we read—

“ He maketh wars to cease unto the ends of the earth;  
He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder;  
He burneth the chariot in the fire :”

and yet more distinctly in Ez.xxxix.9—

“ And they that dwell in the cities of Israel shall go forth, and shall *set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, and the javelins and the spears; and they shall kindle a fire with them seven years.*”

In the text, however, the reference is made not merely to the destruction of Israel’s enemies, especially the Assyrian, whose “ rod ” Jehovah would break ‘ as in the day of Midian,’ against whom—

“ The Lord of Hosts shall stir up a scourge, according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb,” x.26—

but to the permanent establishment of peace, under the powerful reign of the expected prince of the family of David. Thus the prophet Zechariah describes the same glorious time as a time of settled peace, when the arms of war should be “ cut off ” from “ Ephraim ” and from “ Jerusalem ” :—

‘ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
Behold! thy king cometh unto thee;  
He is just and having salvation,  
Meek, and riding upon an ass,  
Even upon a colt, the foal of an ass.  
And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim,  
And the horse from Jerusalem;  
And the battle-bow shall be cut off;  
And he shall speak peace unto the heathen;  
And his dominion shall be from sea even to sea,  
And from the river even to the ends of the earth.’ ix.9.10.

And so Micah says, speaking of the same brilliant time, for which so many pious hearts in Israel were devoutly longing :—

‘ It shall come to pass in that day, saith Jehovah, that I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee, and I will destroy thy chariots.’

In the words which I have just quoted from Zechariah, you recognise, no doubt, some which are also applied in the Gospels to the history of Jesus, when once he entered Jerusalem in triumph, seated upon an ass ;—

“ And the multitudes that went before and that followed cried, saying, ‘ Hosanna to the son of David ! Blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord ! Hosanna in the highest ! ’ ”

But, though it is true, no doubt, that many such passages in the ancient prophets, which predict the glorious time of the expected ‘ son of David,’ may be applied to the facts of our Lord’s history, they cannot *all* be so applied. And it is plain that the prophets themselves looked for a prince of earthly mould, whose kingdom should “ come with observation,” who should be clothed with royal pomp and power, and set his throne, like that of his father David, above all other thrones, and his people above the surrounding nations. Thus Micah speaks of the time of the king as a time of “ peace,” indeed, but of peace maintained by the strong arm of power ; he declares that the war-horse and the chariot shall be cut off out of Israel ; but he says also—

‘ *The remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles, in the midst of many people, as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep ; who, if he go through, both treadeth down, and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver.*’ v.8,9.

And so he says of the same great prince,—

“ Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be the ruler in Israel. . . . And he shall be the peace, *when the Assyrian shall come into our land : . . . and they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof.* Thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrians, when he cometh into our land, and when he treadeth within our borders.”

And, indeed, the passage in Zechariah, which is supposed by many to predict the *humility* of Christ’s character, because it speaks of him as riding on an ass, was not so intended by the original writer. He meant to describe thereby the *calm* and *quietness* which would prevail under the reign of this son of David, but at the same time to express the solemn *dignity*, the mild *majesty*, of His government. ‘ Speak, ye that *ride on white asses,*’ says Deborah to the judges of Israel, Ju.v.10. The thirty sons of Jair “ *rode on thirty ass-colls* and had thirty cities,” Ju.x.4 ; and the forty sons and thirty grandsons of another judge in Israel “ *rode on three-score and ten ass-colls,*” Ju.xii.14. Balaam, we remember, rode upon an ass ; Absalom and the rest

of David's sons rode upon mules, 2S.xiii.29,xviii.9, and David himself had his own royal mules, especially known as such, 1K.i.33,38,44. And, in fact, until Solomon's time, when horses were imported from Egypt, and were then used principally for war-purposes, they were but little employed in Israel; and, accordingly, we are told of overseers being placed over David's 'herds,' and 'camels,' and 'asses,' and 'sheep,' 1Ch.xxvii.29-31, but nothing is said about his *horses*. I will quote what is said on this point in the *Dictionary of the Bible*, III.p.xviii:—

It is almost needless to observe that the ass in eastern countries is a very different animal from what he is in western Europe. *There* the greatest care is taken of the animal, and much attention is paid to cultivate the breed by crossing the finest specimens. The riding on the ass, therefore, conveys a very different notion from the one which attaches to such a mode of conveyance in our own country. The most noble and honourable among the Jews were wont to be mounted on asses; and in this manner our Lord himself made his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. He came, indeed, 'meek and lowly'; but it is a mistake to suppose, as many do, that the fact of his riding on the ass, according to our English ideas, had ought to do with his meekness: although thereby, doubtless, he meant to show the peaceable nature of his kingdom, as horses were used only for war-purposes.

I repeat, then, the ancient prophets, in predicting the coming of a king, "the son of David," did not themselves foresee that spiritual king, the true son of David, whose word has subdued the stubborn heart, whose Divine Teaching has been—

'a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of God's people Israel.'

They looked only for a temporal deliverer, who should 'break the yoke of his burden' for Israel, 'and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor.' They looked for a peaceful and glorious king, as Solomon the son of David was pictured of old, whose throne should be established in righteousness, and endure "unto all generations,"—

"of the increase of whose government and peace there should be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it with judgment and with justice from henceforth and for ever."

This was the king to whom Isaiah's words directly pointed, when he said in the words of the text—

"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death,—upon them hath the light shined;"

and when he said in those other well-known words which follow the text, and which we will consider this evening—

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

[No. 17.—Second Series.]

## A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S, MARITZBURG,

On Sunday Evening, May 6, 1866,

BY THE

RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

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ISAIAH ix.2.—*The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light! They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death—upon them hath the light shined!*

I SPOKE this morning of the circumstances to which these words of the text more directly applied—to which they were meant to apply by the prophet who uttered them. The forces of the king of Assyria had ravaged the northern portions of Palestine,—

“the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea [of Gennesareth], and beyond the Jordan,”—

the district which was called “Galilee of the Gentiles,” that is, ‘the circle of the nations,’ from the number of Gentiles who dwelt within its border, and from the close connection of its inhabitants, generally, with the heathen peoples who lived beyond them. The condition of the country and the blank despair of its occupants, under these dire visitations,—some of which had already taken place, while others were threatened,—are strikingly described in the words just before the text:—

“And they shall pass through it hardly bestead and hungry; and it shall come to pass that, when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their King and their God—[that is, shall curse Jehovah, their Divine King]—and they shall look upward, and they shall look unto the earth; and behold trouble and gloom, dimness of anguish! and they shall be driven into darkness,” viii.21,22.

Yet the prophet sees an end of all this misery, and exclaims in the language of the text—

“The people that were walking in darkness have seen a great light! They that were dwelling in the land of the shadow of death—upon them hath the light shined!”

He beholds in prophetic vision the nation “multiplied,” and its joy “increased,” like the joy of harvest or of those who divide the spoil. He declares that Jehovah has broken the heavy yoke which the people has had to bear, the staff that was laid upon their shoulder, the ‘rod’ wherewith the Assyrian oppressed them, and that henceforth a calm and settled peace should prevail, and all the fierce and bloody panoply of war be burnt in the fire. I showed, by quotations from other prophecies, as those of Micah and Zechariah, that such language was commonly used to express the peaceful character of that glorious time, for which so many pious hearts were longing, when the king, the son of David, should be born, and restore the golden age to Israel,—when, as Isaiah says elsewhere,—

“There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse,  
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots;  
And the spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon him,  
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The spirit of counsel and might,  
The spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah . . .  
And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins,  
And faithfulness the girdle of his reins.  
The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,  
And the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;  
And a little child shall lead them.  
And the cow and the bear shall feed;  
Their young ones shall lie down together;  
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox,  
And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp,  
And the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den.  
They shall not hurt nor destroy,  
In all my holy mountain;  
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah,  
As the waters cover the sea” xi.1-9.

Many of these prophetic expressions are, no doubt, applicable to the kingdom of God, which Christ came to set up on earth,—that spiritual kingdom of “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,” of which the most glorious and happy times under human governments are faint forthshadowings. But they cannot all be thus applied. I instanced this in the passages which I quoted this morning from Micah, where the pro-



mise of this peaceful king is coupled with the assurance of great temporal glory and might reserved for Israel—

“ And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, and as a young lion among the flocks of sheep, who, if he go through, both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver.”

Upon such prophecies as these, interpreted in their own peculiar way, the “ saints ” in Cromwell’s time rested their claim to ‘ tread down and tear in pieces,’ to ‘ execute vengeance in anger and fury ’ upon those whom they were pleased to call the “ heathen.” I showed how the meaning of Zechariah’s famous prophecy of the “ meek ” king of Israel “ riding upon an ass,” was misunderstood by many, as if the riding on such an animal implied in Eastern countries, what it might in ours, humility and degradation, instead of merely the mildness of his government, the peaceful quiet of his reign. But in all these cases, I said, the prophets themselves had no idea, apparently, of that spiritual kingdom, to which their utterances were in later days applied. They were thinking only of a great temporal deliverance, temporal glory, temporal blessings, for Israel—a reign of confirmed peace and surpassing glory, under a powerful and vigorous, yet meek and gentle, just and virtuous, prince of David’s line :—

‘ He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes,  
Neither reprove after the hearing of his ears;  
But with righteousness shall he judge the poor,  
And reprove with equity for the meek of the earth ;  
And he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
And with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.’

And so, that same day, in which this ‘ rod shall come forth out of the stem of Jesse ’ and this ‘ branch grow out of his roots,’ is described immediately as a day of triumphant return to their own land for the scattered remnant of Israel and Judah :—

‘ And it shall come to pass *in that day*,  
That Jehovah shall set His hand again the second time,  
To recover the remnant of his people which shall be left,  
From Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros,  
And from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar,  
And from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea . . .  
And they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west ;  
They shall spoil the children of the East together ;  
They shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab,  
And the children of Ammon shall obey them.  
And the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea ;



And with His mighty wind shall He shake His hand over the river,  
 And shall smite it in the seven streams,  
 And make men go over dryshod.  
 And there shall be an highway from Assyria,  
 For the remnant of His people which shall be left;  
 Like as it was to Israel in the day  
 That he came up out of the land of Egypt."

Thus the prophet is plainly speaking of ancient Egypt and Assyria, and not of the state of things in the time of Christ; for the Assyrian empire was overthrown six centuries before the birth of Christ, and Herodotus, writing two hundred years afterwards, speaks of the Tigris as "the river upon which the town of Nineveh *formerly* stood." Although, therefore, there are expressions in these prophecies, which, picked out and detached from the context, may be and are applied to the times of Christ, yet, it is plain, they were not originally written with this object; they refer directly to the state of things in Israel and Judah in the prophet's own lifetime: and the king, the son of David, of whom they speak, was in Isaiah's view expected to be raised up of that royal line, in order to free the land from the oppression of the Assyrian king.

And this is also true of that prophecy of which the text forms a part, and one verse of which I reserved for further consideration this evening. It is that passage so well known to us by the glorious music, with which it is linked in the greatest work of one of our greatest composers, the Messiah of Handel:—

"For unto us a child is born,  
 Unto us a son is given;  
 And the government shall be upon his shoulder;  
 And his name shall be called Wonderful,  
 Counsellor, the Mighty God,  
 The Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

So accustomed are we to hear these words applied to the birth of Christ that it has scarcely occurred to us, perhaps, to ask if they ever were meant to have—if they ever could have had—another reference. And yet the context, which speaks of "the rod of Israel's oppressor being broker, as in the day of Midian," will remind us that here also we have to do with those present realities, which belonged to the actual condition of Israel at the time when the prophet was writing. Accordingly, if we turn to the Greek (Septuagint) translation of this passage,—made nearly three centuries before the birth of Christ, and therefore not to be suspected

of any anti-Christian tendency, — we find the original Hebrew rendered as follows :—

“ For unto us a child was born, unto us a son was given, and the government was placed upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called messenger (angel) of great counsel; for I will bring peace unto the rulers and health to him.”

This, however, is what is found in one copy of the Greek manuscript. In another the last words are—

“ and his name shall be called Angel of great counsel, Admirable, Counsellor, Mighty, Strong-One, Prince of Peace, Father of the age to come : for I will bring peace and health ”

The Latin Version has also ‘ Father of the future age,’ instead of ‘ the Everlasting Father,’ as our English Bibles translate it. And, indeed, it is obvious, on a moment’s consideration, that this latter expression could hardly be applied with propriety to Christ : while ‘ Father of the age to come ’ might well be used of a pious prince, who should restore the land to its ancient prosperity, and rule it in righteousness,—as well as of him whose teaching has made all things bright for us, who has “ brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel.” It is probable, however, that the Hebrew expression should rather be translated ‘ the *perpetual* Father,’ who should stand, like the everlasting hills, the firm and constant protector and guardian of his people.

In both the Greek translations, however, you will see the phrase ‘ the Mighty God ’ has disappeared altogether. In the first of them, it is plain that the Hebrew itself was read differently by the ancient Jews, who made the translation; in the second, it is represented by the epithets ‘ Mighty ’ and ‘ Strong-One.’ And, in fact, the very same Hebrew expression is used in Ez.xxxii.21; and there our English Version translates it ‘ the strong among the mighty ’; and so in Ez xxxi.11 Nebuchadnezzar is called ‘ the mighty-one of the heathen,’ but, literally, it stands in the Hebrew ‘ the God of heathen.’ So here, in Isaiah, there can be little doubt that the Greek translators have given the true meaning of the prophets, according to whom this glorious son of David should be called, “ The Admirable, the Counsellor, the Mighty Strong-One, the perpetual Father, the Prince of Peace,”—a series of titles, by which he sets forth the wisdom, and glory, and goodness, and peacefulness of his reign, very much after the ordinary Oriental fashion in such cases.

Thus an ancient Greek writer gives a letter from a Persian king to the king of Armenia, which begins as follows :—

Chosroes, king of kings, lord of lords, master of nations, *prince of peace*, saviour of men, among gods a man good and living for ever, among men a god most illustrious, most glorious, conqueror, rising together with the sun and in the night bestowing eyes—[giving light, as it were, by day and by night].

And, accordingly, in Luther's translation of the Bible, the words are rendered thus :—

“ For unto us a child is born, a son to us is given, whose lordship is on his shoulder; and he is called wonderful, counsel, *might*, *hero*, everlasting (or perpetual) father, prince of peace.”

It should be noted also that this verse of Isaiah's prophecies is nowhere quoted in the New Testament with reference to Christ, which would be very remarkable if the English Version contained the right translation of it, since nowhere in the Old Testament would the Divinity of Christ be then more distinctly asserted than here. It is probable that the N.T. writers, who (we know) made use habitually of the Septuagint Version in their quotations, (though sometimes with modifications, which show that they did not consider themselves bound to the strict letter of the Scriptures,) acquiesced in the Greek rendering of this passage, and therefore laid no particular stress upon it. This seems the more likely, inasmuch as a portion of the context is actually quoted, we see, in the words of the text, as expressly applicable to the time of Christ; and to this we will now direct our attention more particularly.

“ The people which sat in darkness  
Have seen a great light;  
And they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death—  
Upon them hath the light shined.”

There are three points worthy of notice in this prophetic utterance.

(i) First, the prophet recognises a time of “ darkness ” in the history of his people, when men were “ sitting in the region and shadow of death.” He recognises here a fact of human experience. There are such times in the history both of nations and of individuals. They may arise, as they did in the case of the prophet's own people, in connection with sin, and as the direct consequence of it. We know in what eloquent words he upbraids them in one place :—

“ Hear, O heavens! and give ear, O earth!  
For Jehovah hath spoken;  
I have nourished and brought up children,  
And they—they have rebelled against me.

The ox knoweth his owner,  
 And the ass his master's crib;  
 But Israel doth not know,  
 My people doth not consider.  
 Ah sinful nation! people laden with iniquity!  
 Seed of evildoers! children that are corrupters!  
 They have forsaken Jehovah,  
 They have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger,  
 They have gone away backward.  
 Why should ye be stricken any more?  
 Ye will revolt more and more;  
 The whole head is sick,  
 And the whole heart faint . . .  
 Your country is desolate,  
 Your cities burned with fire;  
 Your land—strangers devour it in your presence,  
 And it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers."

Thus he regards their miseries as the direct chastisement of their sins. A dark day, in fact, had settled down upon the land of Israel. The Assyrians had already ravaged the northern portion of it; and, though at present their king was in league with Ahaz king of Judah,—who, in direct opposition to Isaiah's urgent remonstrance, had summoned him to his help against the forces of Syria and Israel,—the prophet foresaw that his powerful arms would in due time be turned against Judah and Jerusalem also.

And so it very soon came to pass. Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, on coming to the throne, 'rebelled,' we are told, 'against the king of Assyria, and served him not,'—that is, he broke the compact which his father had made to pay a certain annual tribute. Thereupon, in Hezekiah's fourth year, the king of Assyria came up in fury first against Samaria and besieged it; and at the end of three years he took it, and carried away the population of the Ten Tribes—the kingdom of Israel—as captives into a far-off land. Then, in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, the Assyrian host came up against the fenced cities of Judah and took them. And Hezekiah humbled himself, sending to the king of Assyria and saying—

'I have offended; return from me; that which thou puttest on me will I bear.'

Yet still the tide of war rolled on, and reached at length the very gates of Jerusalem. And then indeed was a time of great anxiety.

'If one looked unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow!  
 And the light is darkened in the heavens thereof';

and the people sat down in mute despair, 'in the land of the shadow of death.'

We observe, therefore, that such darkness, when the light of God's Face seems for a while to be obscured, is not *always* a consequence of sin. For Hezekiah was a prince of deep and sincere piety. We are told of him, on his accession to the throne, that—

‘He trusted in Jehovah, the God of Israel: so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to Jehovah, and departed not from following Him, but kept His commandments, which Jehovah commanded Moses. And Jehovah was with him, and prospered him whithersoever he went forth.’

Yet, after all this promising beginning, we find Hezekiah plunged in deep distress, and sitting in darkness deeper than any which had come down upon his idolatrous father, Ahaz. In one word, righteous persons and peoples, as well as wicked ones, may be bowed down at times under sore afflictions,—may be called for a while to “sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.”

(ii) But, secondly, the prophet recognises, with the clear insight of a living faith, that in such darkness men sit not alone. There is One near them, who may make His Presence felt at any moment, and surely at the right time will appear as the helper of all that put their trust in Him. Thus Isaiah was able to comfort the drooping Hezekiah with the assurance, that light would break forth out of the darkness, that Jehovah would ‘defend his city to save it for His own sake, and for His servant David’s sake.’ Nay, even under the idolatrous Ahaz, he could entertain a confidence that, when chastisement had done its perfect work upon the rebellious hearts of God’s children, the favour of Jehovah and the light of His Countenance would be restored to them. With a prophetic glance into the future, he could actually see already this restoration brought to pass: he could even then exclaim—

“The people that walked in darkness  
Have seen a great light;  
They that were dwelling in the land of the shadow of death,—  
Upon them hath the light shined.”

And then he predicts, in the language which we have already considered, the glorious reign of a just and pious prince, under whom this deliverance should be wrought for them.

It is not at all improbable that he had Hezekiah himself in view, who was about twelve years old when this prophecy was written, and, like our own Edward VI, perhaps gave



already plain signs of the tractable and pious spirit which he afterwards displayed. And he was doubtless from the first under the direct influence of the prophet Isaiah, (who is believed also to have been a family connection,) as our own English prince was under that of Cranmer. Or it may be that the prophet looked still further down the stream of time, and saw in some distant age arise 'the rod out of the stem of Jesse,'—

'of the increase of whose government and peace there should be no end upon the throne of David.'

In any case the hopes of Isaiah were not fulfilled in the temporal sense which his words imply, and in which, no doubt, he expected their fulfilment. Never was that grand vision of his generous spirit realised in its literal meaning:—

'In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve [Jehovah] with the Assyrian. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: whom Jehovah of Hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.' xix.23-25.

But Assyria and Egypt were never united with Israel in one common worship of Jehovah, the Living God. It is possible, of course, to have recourse to the usual process of 'spiritualising' these words, and saying that by "Egypt" and "Assyria" must be meant not the countries so-called,—to which, however, they would of course be applied by the very persons to whom Isaiah addressed himself,—but the heathen generally, so that the prediction means no more than that the future Church of Christ should contain believers from different peoples, from every nation under heaven. But why must this particular portion of the prophecy be 'spiritualised,' whereas others, when it suits our convenience, must be taken literally, and regarded as infallible prognostications of coming events? This is, in fact, to treat the Bible with dishonour, by choosing at our own pleasure what we will regard as actual *bona fide* predictions of special circumstances, and what we will explain generally, stripping it thus of all its point and force and meaning 'or those to whom it was uttered. That orthodox commentator, the Rev. Thos. Scott, observes on this passage—

I apprehend that the grand accomplishment of these verses, and of the latter part of this extraordinary prophecy, *is still to be expected*:—

that is, he admits that it has not yet been fulfilled; though how '*Assyria*' can now be joined with '*Egypt*' and

‘Israel,’ in a common act of worship, must seem to most persons inconceivable.

(iii) I observe, then, thirdly, that the true prophetic insight was here exercised, not in prognosticating the details of future events, but in laying down the great principles of God’s dealings with men,—in affirming the eternal truths,—in uttering the Word of God, by which the hearts of men in all ages are fed as with living bread. The people did *not* repent and return to God, as Isaiah expected: the glorious prince whom he predicted did *not* arise to—

‘set up an ensign for the nations, and assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.’

The people of Israel did *not*, as he predicted, ‘lay their hand upon Edom and Moab,’ nor did ‘the children of Ammon obey them’; nor were Assyria and Egypt ever joined with Israel in the bonds of a holy alliance. In respect of such details, and a multitude of others like them, we must admit that Isaiah and other prophets have been mistaken: while yet the Divine Truths which they taught, the Divine Principles which they announed,—the real signs of their prophetic power,—were the Living Word of God, eternally and unchangeably true. *It is true that—*

‘Light is sown for the righteous, and joyful gladness for such as are true of heart’ :—

and for such as these the prophet might utter his oracle with the most perfect and unwavering confidence :—

“Who is among you that feareth Jehovah,  
That obeyeth the voice of His servant,  
That walketh in darkness and hath no light?  
Let him trust in the name of Jehovah,  
And stay upon his God.”

Nay, he might exclaim of them, as one who saw the end of God’s work from the beginning—

“The people that walked in darkness  
Have seen a great light;  
They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death—  
Upon them hath the light shined.”

But then the Light, which “cometh down from the Father of Lights”—the Light, which is the Life of men,—the Light that in all ages comforts the sad heart and gladdens the weary eye,—is not the light of this world’s splendour, such as the prophet in the words which follow the text, and in many other parts of his prophecies, expects to be bestowed on his people and their king. It is the Light of Truth, the

Light of Righteousness, the Light of Love. This is that 'sure word of prophecy,' of which we were speaking last Sunday—

"whereunto we shall do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the daystar arise in our hearts."

And the prophets of old felt this, though they did not fully realise it, as we do now, taught by the lips of Jesus Christ himself. And so Isaiah in these prophecies, while continually insisting upon the return of Israel to their own land and the restoration of their temporal glory, still lays the basis of all their future happiness in the practice of justice and righteousness, by the people at large, and especially by their king. All his hopes for them were based on this, that—  
'Zion should be redeemed with judgment, and they that return of her with righteousness'—

that—

'her judges should be restored as at the first, and her counsellors as at the beginning, and afterward she should be called The city of righteousness, the faithful city'—

that her prince should sit upon the throne of David—

'to order it and to establish it, with judgment and with justice from henceforth and for ever.'

And in the view of this he could address the city of Zion—

'In that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise Thee; though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortest me. Behold! God is my salvation: I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; He also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.'

Alas! the happy time never came for the people at large, for which the prophet longed so devoutly. Lower and lower dropped the gloom upon the land; deeper and deeper became the darkness,—relieved at times by a temporary lifting of the clouds, as in the days of Hezekiah and Josiah, but becoming fearfully black in the reign of Manasseh, Hezekiah's son, who—

'seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom Jehovah destroyed before the children of Israel'—

and in those of Jehoiakim, Josiah's son, and Zedekiah, Josiah's brother, each of whom—

'did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, according to all that his fathers had done'—

and under the last of whom the cup of Israel's iniquities were full, and they were 'driven away' into the thick darkness—a darkness 'which might be felt'—into the terrible gloom of the Babylonish captivity.

So far, then, as Isaiah coupled with the promise of 'light' the promise also of national prosperity, his words, it must be confessed, were not realised. But the light was there, notwithstanding, for all true hearts. Hezekiah was cheered and enabled to put his trust in the Living God, in the midst of all his griefs and perplexities. Josiah received a message of peace, while the woe was gathering upon the head of his people,—

' because his heart was tender, and he had humbled himself before the Lord.'

And each pious soul, we may be sure,—our own hearts "prophecy" this, and all experience confirms it,—was Divinely soothed and comforted in that most gloomy time of trial—was taught to smile amidst its tears, and say—

' It is of Jehovah's mercies that we are not consumed,  
Because His compassions fail not.  
They are new every morning:  
Great is Thy faithfulness.  
Jehovah is my portion, saith my soul;  
Therefore will I hope in Him.  
Jehovah is good unto them that wait for Him,—  
To the soul that seeketh Him.  
It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait  
For the salvation of Jehovah.'

Let us be sure it is so still. In every age, for nations and for individuals, the words of the prophet are fulfilled, that—

' They that were walking in darkness  
Have seen great light;  
They that were dwelling in the land of the shadow of death—  
Upon them hath the light shined.'

The time would fail me now to speak more at length of the numerous instances in the history of the world, in which such a prediction has been eminently fulfilled, as at the time of the return of the Jews from Babylon, at the time of the first preaching of Christianity, at the time of the Great Reformation,—when light has been given from the Father of Lights to dispel the clouds of darkness, which had long been gathering and brooding over the hearts of men. But in our own time, too, such light has been abundantly given. For—though it cannot be said that this age, in which we live, is actually dark, as it was before the Reformation, when witches were put to death, and heretics burnt at the stake, as if the Christian's God, like that of the Jews in Manasseh's time, was a very Moloch, who required to be worshipped with human sacrifices,—yet surely there is "dimness" enough within the Church, and "darkness" among

the heathen tribes without it; and the pure bright Light of the Everlasting Gospel, the tidings of our Father's Love, has been darkened in many places with the arbitrary dogmas, and discoloured with the vain traditions, of men. Yet God, in His Infinite Goodness, has poured forth light abundantly around us in this our day,—bright and strong enough, we trust, to pierce the thickest gloom of traditionary teaching, and reveal once more the Blessed Face of our loving Father, which has been so long obscured.

But, while we rejoice in this Light, which is freely given us, let us be careful also to walk in the Light, as children of God,—to “walk in the Light as He is in the Light,” that we may “have fellowship with Him”—

coming to the Light continually, and bringing our doings to the Light, that they may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.”

It has been said that the Modern Theology will make men careless and godless,—that it may even bring back upon us the times of unbridled license and lust, and all the horrors of the French Revolution. No! the Modern Theology is in very truth a return to the clear and solemn teaching of Jesus himself. It brings the soul face to face with the Living God, as a Father and Friend: it quickens the conscience in the sense of that Gracious, yet Awful, Presence, which we feel at every instant so near to us. It tells us that our loving Father will not suffer us to sin without chastisement,—that, if we will persist in what we know to be evil, He may withdraw from us altogether for a time the joy of His salvation, the Light of His Countenance. It bids us repent and return at once from the path that leadeth unto death, lest we lose ourselves in guilt and misery: it says to us—

“Give glory to the Lord your God, before He cause darkness and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, He turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness.”

But it speaks also a word of hope and life to the returning penitent. It assures us of a Father's Love, that will meet the poor prodigal on the way, as he comes along drooping and hesitating, stricken through with grief and shame, to his long-forsaken home,—that will embrace him with the tokens of forgiveness,—will ‘heal him, and lead him, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners.’





